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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critique of a publication concerning the role of ethnic analysis in social work intervention. The author of the latter makes the point that social work education needs to put more emphasis on environmental and ethnic considerations when designing treatment modalities. The stages presented for developing principles for practice are examined, as are other concerns relating to course content, the "ethnic experience," group self identity, dialectical and language diversity, etc. The author recommends that the described approach be used by practitioners who work with all non-mainstream groups. (SJL)

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A Critique of:

Charles Garvin, ""Ethnic Analysis and Social Work Intervention"

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Council of Social Work Education
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Garvin makes the strong point that social work education must put more emphasis on environmental and ethnic considerations when designing treatment modalities.

The typology developed by Valentine (1968),and expanded by Garvin,should be included in all curricula. The point of practitioner and ethnic group linkages becomes a concern because of the frustrations felt by social workers and the disenfranchisement felt by ethnic groups during the helping process.

When discussing social work intervention, several stages were presented that should be used when developing practice principles. I would suggest, however, that the second step should come earlier and be expanded. First, the social worker should gather information on the ethnic group. Then I would add that the second step should be the examination of his own attitudes and biases towards the ethnic group. This is crucial, for if negative ideas are held and repressed, all of the other steps taken will be impacted and negated. The third step should then be to consider the ethnic factors in defining the social work goals. These three steps should be taken <u>before</u> attempts are made to gain entré into the group or community.

Garvin side-stepped the issue of how ethnic content should be presented. But since this is a conference on Social Work Education, I feel that some discussion should be given to it.

Various schools have taken different approaches: first, having integrated content, or secondly, presenting ethnic data in separate courses. This content usually focused only on institutional racism, but avoided the issues of personal racism and cultural content. The

history of the presentation of such content, over the last eight to ten years, has shown that the separate course approach is most vulnerable to the institutional racism within the school itself. Racism occurs in terms of deletion during financially tight periods, assignment of time slots and professors, and dropping it as a requirement after protests by non-Black faculty and students.

Having minority and/or ethnic content separate from the core curriculum should be seen as a stop-gap measure until the core can be expanded to include these contents. The social work profession should not have just a committment" to ethnic minorities" for this appears to come from an elitist position of being nice to those poor unfortunate people. Rather, social work education should have a committment to prepare social workers to help all people, regardless of their ethnic background, be it Black, non-Black, native American, or white ethnic. To do this, it is necessary that the Schools of Social Work present data within the regular courses of their various sequences of Human Growth and Development, Research, Practicum, and Methods. This goal should be to increase an understanding of the social worker's own ethnocentrism, the culture of the most prevalent ethnic groups and the appropriate practice implications.

The need to incorporate ethnic content into the regular curriculum continues because the majority of contacts between a social worker and a person from an ethnic group will be with a social worker who is not from that ethnic group.

The Manpower Data Bank survey made of 32,706 NASW members in 1975 found that only 14.5% were from non-white ethnic groups. 85.5% of the members still are from the dominant group. It therefore is impossible to have most intervention in ethnic minority groups done by a person

who is a member of that group. The picture will not change markedly in the future.

CSWE did a survey in 1974 of the number of ethnics enrolled in social work education. From 1972 to 1974 the percent of Blacks enrolled in the first year fell from 16% to 13% and decreased in the second year from 15% to 13%. The Chicano and Puerto Rican enrollment remained at the same low levels of approximately 2% of total enrollment.

A point that Garwin made that I would like to repeat is the diversity of attitude and experiences that is found within ethnic groups. In attempting to understand the ethnic experience, social workers often simply replace one stereotype with another. They tend to deny the individuality of the ethnic experience. There is also a strong tendency for social workers to intertwine social class and race in reference to minorities. Hardships and the results of lower socio-economic status are often attributed to race. An example would be Zuk (1974), who states that he finds it easier to provide family therapy to Jews than to Blacks. Maybe his own training (ethnocentrism) lets him overlook his own data, in that the Jews in his practice were middle-class (as he was), while the Blacks, a group foreign to him, were poor. He r e a l l y was saying that his family therapy procedures were more successful with middle-class clients - period. The danger is that a student may read this as Blacks are a difficult group for which to provide therapy and would approach his next Black client with a failure-prophesy mentality. Garvin's ethnic analyses would be very useful in such a situation. The belief in cultural diversity and respect for the perspectives of ethnic minority groups, be they Black or non-Black, must continue to be reinforced.

The point of respecting dialectical and language diversity in ethnic groups is a very good one. Yet the author in the next paragraph makes a common mistake of referring to "non-standard English". This is an ethnocentric contradiction of the sociolinguist's acceptance of Black English as a valid language with its own laws, based on the cultural continuity of African languages in the Western hemisphere. The issues brought up are very valid, however. Linguists may feel Black English is valid, but the dominant culture does not. Social workers must learn to communicate with clients who do not use the accepted English, not by a phony adaptation of "Black talk," but by at least being able to understand it. The social worker must also provide the client with the knowledge that because of prejudice against cultural diversities the person who is unable to communicate with members of other groups will be at an economic disadvantage.

One concern I did have with the paper was that Blacks did not seem to be included within the discussion of the cultural groups, in the body of the paper. Black Americans were discussed within the historical context of the development of ethnic group self-identity. But from pages 10 through the end, 44% of the paper, no mention was made of Blacks. I felt that several of his statements could be interpreted to apply to Blacks. Yet repeated references were made to other ethnic groups: Native Americans, Irish, Jews, and Puerto Ricans. I wonder if this was an oversight on the author's part, or was he indeed only interested in non-black or non-colonialized ethnic groups. Or was he unfamiliar with the growing literature, both empirical and conceptual,which now exists on the Black family, that could have related to several points in the paper. The exclusions of Blacks and non-white

ethnics from the new ethnicity movement concerns many Blacks. Again, it appears that Blacks are not viewed as a valid cultural-ethnic group, but only as an economic-racial group that has problems.

I am aware that some social scientists would argue that Blacks are not a cultural group, that they were stripped of all culture and became simply a product of slavery and racism, combined with slightly inferior genes. Therefore, they logically would not be included in a discussion of ethnicity. Fortunately, this widely held view is being challenged and discredited on many fronts. Authors in the field of ethnography, linguistics, ethno-musicology, oral history, and others have collected diverse data that would support my contention that Blacks are a distinct cultural group, meeting the criteria presented by Gordon (1964). While oppressed, Blacks have developed a sense of peoplehood, social organizations, and networks that reinforce ethnic identity. These have evolved as a result of a common cultural-continental origin, the involuntary passage to the new world, and by common experiences within this country. As Papajohn and Spiegel (1975) have shown, a profile of beliefs can be developed in any cultural context. The view of Blacks as an ethnic group is compatible with knowledge of the diversity of the Black experience.

Garvin mentioned Blauner's (1969) comparison of colonized groups and ethnic minorities. Even the colonialized groups have continued to share uniquenesses that have not been erased by the colonial experience. I would contend that Garvin's analysis of social work intervention is an excellent approach that should be used by practitioners who work with all non-mainstream groups, including Blacks.

This approach should not be saved for just immigrant minorities, who came to America voluntarily,in search of a better life. It should be consistently applied whenever a practitioner from the dominant culture approaches those of the many ethnic-minority groups.

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Zuk,